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FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3957
INFO RUEHK/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 9336
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 6232
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 4269
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 3105
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 9824
RUEHN/AMEMBASSY OSLO PRIORITY 3195
RUEHSM/AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM PRIORITY 0299
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 2271
RUEHCl/AMCONSUL CALCUTTA PRIORITY 0219
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 6782
RUEHB1/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 4651
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEHN/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 1268
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 001266

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TAGS: PGOV PTER CE

SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: VIOLENCE IN THE EAST INTENSIFIES

REF: A. COLOMBO 1262

1B. COLOMBO 1246
1C. COLOMBO 1235

Classified By: CDA JAMES F. ENTWISTLE FOR REASONS 1.4(b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary: The initial battle for control of an irrigation canal in the eastern Batticaloa District (reflets) gave rise to further military engagement August 1-2. Beginning the night of August 1, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) attacked 4 military camps in Mutur and surrounding areas in Trincomalee District in the east. While the army camps remain intact, LTTE fire damaged a jetty and possibly other infrastructure in the area.

Furthermore, LTTE shelling hit a hospital in Mutur town, killing 1 civilian and injuring 9. Against this backdrop, Norwegian peace envoy Jon Hanssen Bauer is due to arrive in Colombo August 4 to discuss the deteriorating situation with both the government and the LTTE. Hanssen Bauer will also attempt to persuade the LTTE to permit European Union (EU) monitors to remain in the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM), an effort that seems unlikely to bear fruit in the current climate. End summary.

12. (C) What began as a ground battle over an irrigation canal in Mavil Aru in Batticaloa District in the east (reflets) has spread to a larger military engagement between the government of Sri Lanka (GSL) and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. Late the night of August 1 local time, the LTTE attacked 4 army camps in Mutur and surrounding areas in Trincomalee District in the east. According to Canadian poloff who attended an August 2 defense briefing, 2 of the camps were located in government-controlled territory, while the other 2, south of Trincomalee town, were technically in government-controlled territory but in areas that had been over-run by the LTTE in the last 2 years. All 4 camps remain intact, but LTTE fire took out a jetty and some other infrastructure, Canadian poloff reported. In addition, the LTTE continued attacks on the naval base at the entrance to

Trincomalee Harbor and Muttur Bay base. DAoff also attended the August 2 defense briefing and reported that the navy is sending reinforcements to Trincomalee, Muttur, and surrounding areas. In an August 2 phone conversation with pol FSN, a Tamil journalist in Trincomalee said 5 Sri Lankan Navy personnel died and their bodies were brought to Trincomalee General Hospital. The reporter also said 5 LTTE cadres had been killed in Muttur town.

¶13. (C) In an August 2 phone conversation with pol FSN, military spokesman Major Rajapakse said LTTE fire hit a hospital in Muttur town, killing 1 civilian and injuring 9. The spokesman added that police had evacuated 2 outposts in Muttur town in the face of LTTE attacks, and that the LTTE carried out small attacks in Muttur throughout the day August 2. According to UK poloff, who spoke to UN officials in Trincomalee, large numbers of civilians are fleeing Muttur to go to government-controlled territory, and the LTTE has sent out a flyer telling Muslims to leave Muttur and surrounding areas.

¶14. (C) On August 1 Norwegian special envoy Erik Solheim spoke to Sri Lankan President Rajapaksa by phone, and on August 2 Norwegian Ambassador Hans Brattskar gave Charge' a readout on the "heated" telephone conversation. Rajapaksa had opened by urging Norway to "engage more fully," a statement Solheim asked him to clarify. Rajapaksa responded that Norway should "pressure the LTTE." Solheim asked whether the GSL had any particular initiatives or messages for Norway to convey or clarify to the LTTE

COLOMBO 00001266 002 OF 002

when Jon Hanssen-Bauer arrives August 4. "Rajapakse gave nothing in response," Brattskar reported. Solheim received the strong impression that subordinates do not fully inform Rajapaksa about the details of Norway's efforts or about the ongoing military campaign. Brattskar noted that this is especially worrisome in light of commensurate concerns as to whether LTTE underlings like political leader Tamilchelvan accurately brief leader Prabhakaran after meetings with the Norwegians. Brattskar said that Solheim came away with the strong impression that Rajapaksa is under heavy pressure to continue the military option, commenting that such action would be hugely unpopular in the rural South. The Norwegians assess that President Rajapaksa is determined to maintain the support of the Marxist, Sinhalese nationalist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) and Buddhist monk-based Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU). Both the JVP and JHU would strongly oppose a pull back on the military option or any new peace initiative. Brattskar concluded that Rajapaksa gave Solheim "nothing to work with" beyond repeated exhortations to "pressure the LTTE." Solheim plans to call Rajapaksa again in the days ahead.

¶15. (C) Earlier, some analysts and interlocutors had expressed hope that Hanssen-Bauer might convince the LTTE to reverse its insistence that EU monitors leave the SLMM. However, at a reception at the Charge's the evening of August 1, a Swedish member of the SLMM told poloff that the Swedes, in addition to the Danes and the Finns, would recall their monitors from the SLMM. Others in the diplomatic and NGO communities seemed to echo a sense of pessimism. August 2, UK poloff, who had gone with UK DCM to Kilinochchi to see LTTE leadership the previous week, said the LTTE had "absolutely no interest" in seeing the SLMM remain in Sri Lanka at full strength.

¶16. (C) Comment: With military engagement spreading increasingly further from the flashpoint at the

irrigation canal, it appears there is little "cease-fire" left for the SLM/M to monitor. Yet the government continues to deny an abrogation, and each side blames the other for the continued violence. As one BBC reporter told poloff, "The LTTE set the trap and the government fell right into it." The government had shown impressive restraint in the face of repeated LTTE provocations, including attacks on Sri Lankan Navy installations and civilians. However, once the government began air strikes in response to the LTTE's holding a civilian water source hostage, eventually attempting a ground offensive, the LTTE, in typical fashion, responded with disproportionate counter-attacks. It is unclear how long the fighting will continue, and it seems unlikely that in the present political climate, Hanssen Bauer's visit can yield any positive result. End comment.

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